

STANDING UP FOR OUR RIGHTS:

FEMINIST INSIGHTS FROM THE
UKRAINE RESPONSE





Displaced women and children arrive at Hrebenne, a crossing point on the Polish side of the Ukraine-Poland border where ActionAid and partner PAH were working (Simona Supino/ActionAid).

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About this Policy Report

The response to Russia's military assault to Ukraine is yet another example of how the international system fails to acknowledge and promote the incredible work of civil society organisations like women's rights organisations, (WROs), women-led organisations (WLOs) and young people's groups. These groups play critical roles in crisis response, despite their efforts lacking both political and financial support.

This policy report has been developed in collaboration with 28 ActionAid partners¹ working in the Ukraine response. It provides practical recommendations to help humanitarian actors, donors and governments shift away from traditional humanitarian mechanisms towards adapting transformative and inclusive ways to reach those in need.

As the frequency of emergencies continues to increase, the international community must commit to working in partnership with WLOs, WROs and youth-led organisations. They must also undertake appropriate conflict and gendered analysis at all stages of conflict response. As ActionAid, we are conscious that we are still learning how best to promote humanitarian responses focusing on decolonial and anti-racist approaches that aim to shift power to our partner organisations and those most in need. We are still in the process of finding how best to promote fair and sustainable partnerships while ensuring due diligence and donor requirements and appreciate the honest conversations we have with our partner organisations. We continuously try to improve our gender and conflict analysis, so women and young people and their movements are not exposed to new risks. This is not only important for the conflict in Ukraine, but for crises around the globe including the East Africa Droughts, and the recent devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

Acknowledgements

We want to extend our thanks and gratitude to the many WROs, WLOs and young people's organisations who gave their time, insights and

expertise to bring this report together. Without their reflections and ongoing work, it would not have been possible. It is our hope that with this brief, we will ultimately improve civil societies' ability to meaningfully engage in humanitarian solutions for the communities they serve. Big thanks to: ADRA; Asociația pentru Dezvoltare prin Educație, Informare și Susținere; Campaign Against Homophobia; Centrul de Mediere și Securitate Comunitară; Dom Otworthy; Egala; eLiberare; Feminoteka; Fundacja dla Somalii; Fundacja Polza; Fundația Națională pentru Tineret; Insight; Kuchnia Konfliktu; Legalife; LOGS- Grup de Initiative Sociale; Mai Bine; Migrant Integration Center Brasov; NGO Girls; Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet/Polish Women's Strike; Platforma Femeilor Rome-ROMNI; Polish Humanitarian Action; Roma Awareness Foundation; Romanian Women's Lobby; Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health; Ukrainian Women's Fund; Vostok SOS; Women Association "Sphere"; Youth Organization "STAN".

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Contents

About this Policy Report

Introduction & Background 05

Key Findings 08

1. Women and girl's protection 08

2. Dignified living 12

3. Discrimination and racism 17

4. Transforming the humanitarian system: equitable
partnerships and funding streams 19

Conclusion & Recommendations 21

Endnotes 24

Introduction & Background

It is impossible to express the impact of the war on Ukraine in words and numbers. One year since the Russian Federation illegally invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022, civilians continue to be affected by continuous fighting. This invasion follows eight years of ongoing conflict in the eastern parts of Ukraine, a conflict which has been escalated by the war.² Thousands have died or been injured as whole cities are left with no basic services or infrastructure for energy, housing, healthcare or education. From 24 February 2022 to 13 February 2023, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded 18,955 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 7,199 killed and 11,756 injured.³ In that period, Russian attacks have destroyed at least 40% of Ukraine's energy facilities⁴ and millions of refugees have fled to neighbouring countries, the largest displacement Europe has experienced since World War II.⁵

As in all armed conflicts, women and girls are the worst impacted – most of over 8 million refugees⁶ generated by the conflict and the majority of 6.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women and girls.⁷ Even before the 2014 war in Eastern Ukraine, gender-based violence (GBV) was already highly prevalent in Ukraine in the form of sexual harassment, domestic violence and human trafficking.⁸ Now, the fighting and displacement is causing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). This violence intersects with the discrimination

experienced by people from different ethnic backgrounds, religion, identity, age, disability and social constraints. Before the war, these women were already struggling to access adequate housing, employment and education. Now, they face even greater barriers in accessing GBV services, reproductive healthcare and psychosocial support services from national authorities and international humanitarian actors.

Despite these challenges, women, WROs and WLOs are at the frontline of caring responsibilities in households as well as leading national and local civil society organisations, emergency protection and assistance services. Their work aims to advance and defend gender equality and women's rights, through WROs and WLOs, and young people-led organisations and initiatives. Their long-term mandates include addressing discrimination, providing sustainable and dignified livelihoods, and protecting women's rights. This work is essential to upholding women's rights while military priorities dominate Ukraine and the region. ActionAid and partner's evidence and experience highlight that WROs and WLOs bring valuable skills and assets to localised humanitarian action. They are often able to gain access to hard-to-reach communities and those most marginalised within them, they bring a strong understanding of the local context and the needs and realities of women, girls and the community as a whole, and they



Zosin crossing point on the Polish-Ukraine border Where ActionAid partners PAH (Polish Humanitarian Action) are operating (Simona Supino/ActionAid).

offer crucial insight into how to engage with key stakeholders. Evidence and our experience also shows that engaging young people in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery will bring better, more localised and more accountable responses.⁹

Many women leaders and their organisations in the region face harassment, legal prosecution, and other threats. These organisations are also not receiving adequate funding and partnerships from international donors and intermediaries to accomplish their double mandate mission. Donors and intermediaries are, understandably, keen to access newly liberated areas, but they are pressuring women-led organisations to provide assistance without also offering the funding for adequate equipment or training.¹⁰

WRO and WLO organisations also do not have a place in the government and UN-led decision-making spaces.¹¹ Women's organisations from Ukraine and the region were absent, as well as gender and women's rights issues, from the 2022 international conferences on Ukraine's Recovery, such as in Lugano, Switzerland and Berlin, Germany.¹² Without this external financial support and political recognition, they are struggling to keep their long-term mandate of advocating against discrimination including racism and gender inequality. Their activism and service has been disregarded in the response to urgent humanitarian needs, and staff and volunteers feel overwhelmed by competing demands. This corroborates what ActionAid is hearing from women-led and young people-led organisations working in crisis in other parts of the globe.

This report brings out ActionAid's experience in supporting WROs and WLOs and young people-led organisations who have taken leadership in the provision of assistance and protection to the most marginalised groups in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. Recognising limitations in including all groups which have been marginalised in these contexts¹³, the report mainly focuses on self-organised excluded communities among ActionAid partners, with specific references to the experiences of women and organisations who represent people who are Roma, LGBTQIA+, sex workers and third country nationals.¹⁴ It details the difficulties these organisations face in reaching marginalised communities affected by conflict, while also staying true to their long-term mandates. The report ends with a set of recommendations for donors and intermediaries like UN and INGOs on how they can be trusted and effective partners for grassroots, national and local WROs and WLOs.

In December 2022, the United Nations launched its largest global humanitarian appeal.¹⁵ It reported that, in 2023 a record 339 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection – at least 17.6 million of them in Ukraine.¹⁶ This includes 6.3 million internally displaced people, 4.4 million returnees and 6.9 million people who have remained in their homes throughout the war. Near 5 million Ukrainians live as registered refugees in Europe.¹⁷

People in Ukraine are struggling to cope with the vast destruction of energy infrastructure, homes and livelihoods. This is exacerbating pre-existing needs, especially when combined with freezing winter temperatures.

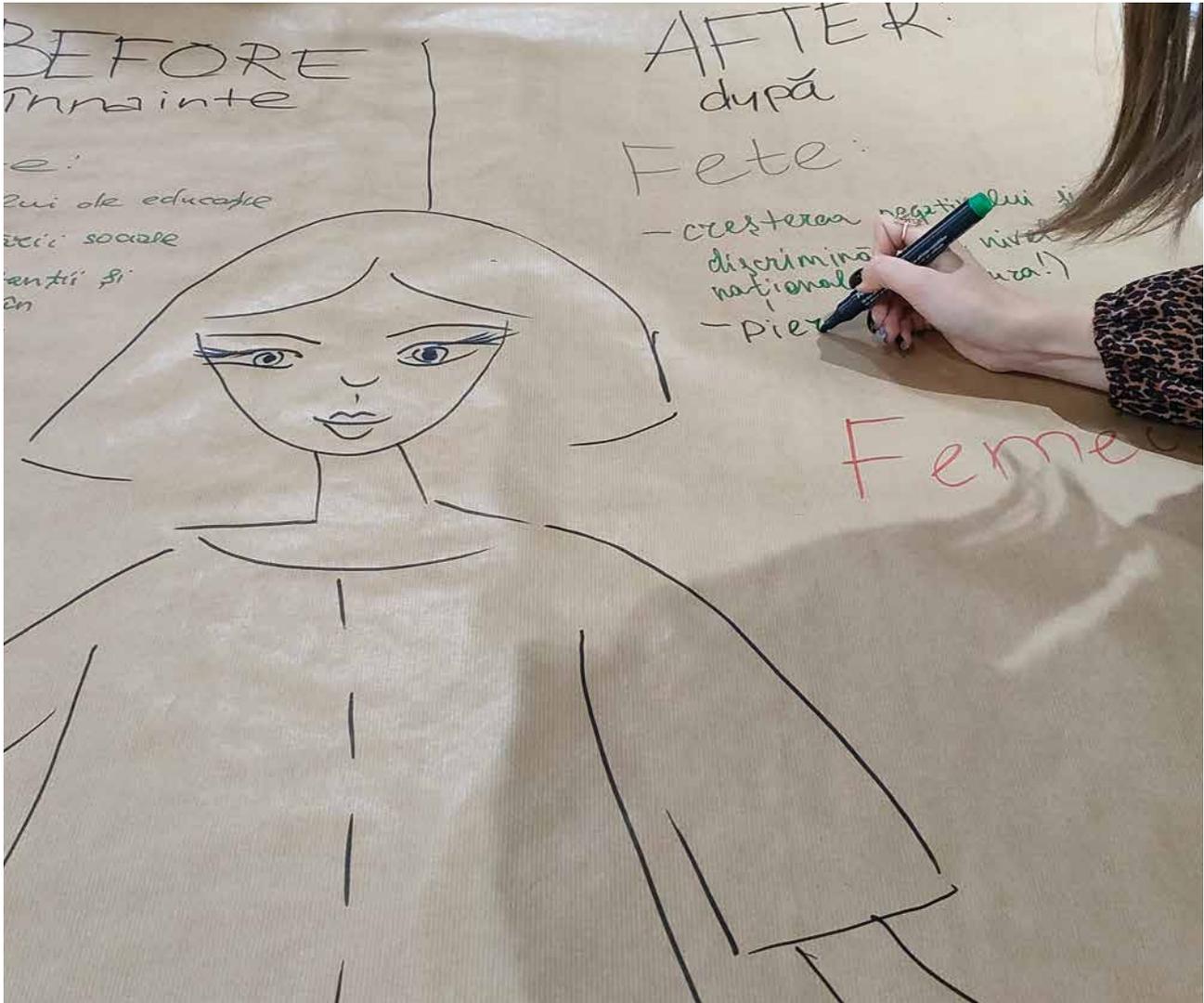
ActionAid's Partner-Led Ukraine Humanitarian Response:

ActionAid responds to emergencies through its Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA).¹⁸ This is informed by an understanding that disaster-affected people have the right to assistance in a dignified manner, including access to immediate lifesaving support to meet basic needs, alongside the need to address underlying inequalities and promote long-term change. This is guided by a set of feminist principles that ActionAid has adopted as part of its action plan for a world free from poverty, oppression, and patriarchy.¹⁹ ActionAid is committed to intersectional feminism as an ideology, an analytical framework and a social change strategy.

ActionAid's humanitarian work is guided by three key components:

1. **Shifting power** – by enabling national and local leadership in programme design and response, and supporting our partners to access national funding and advocacy opportunities.
2. **Accountability to affected communities** – recognising that all stakeholders and actors must be accountable to crisis- and disaster-affected communities.
3. **Women and young people's leadership** – by promoting the leadership and agency of women and young people, especially those with intersectional identities, and ensuring their needs and agency are at the centre of humanitarian responses.

These components aim to provide resilience and longer-term sustainability, to shift power to people and address underlying inequalities at every level, that not only ensures a more effective response to crises, but also addresses systemic issues, power imbalances, vulnerability and inequality.



A member of ROMNI staff is identifying challenges for women's and girls' before and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, during the preparation of the report *Standing up for our Rights: Feminist Insights from the Ukraine Response* (Carol Garcia/ActionAid).

ActionAid's response in Ukraine uses a feminist and decolonial frame of analysis that prioritises collaboration with national and local partners. For ActionAid, 'localisation' encompasses shifting the power from international to local, and from a male-dominated system to one which where women and young people are empowered.

As of February 2023, ActionAid and partners have provided support to more than 1,5 million people and 15,690,00 households. They have trained more than 1,000 members of staff and volunteers, and have reached more than 470,000 people through media campaigns on GBV prevention (Ukraine) and anti-trafficking (Romania).

Since March 2022, ActionAid has worked with 38 partners across its current response cycle, of which 87% of these partnerships are WROs, WLOs, LGBTQIA+, diaspora and young people's organisations.²⁰

Through these partners, ActionAid has been able to better understand and respond to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of refugees fleeing Ukraine, predominantly women and girls. Working with partners in Ukraine and neighbouring Moldova, Poland and Romania has helped ActionAid target at-risk groups quicker, and more effectively. This approach promotes the role, agency and leadership of national and local CSOs, to shift power away from the traditional model of humanitarian response, by placing the needs and agency of disaster-affected communities at the centre of humanitarian action.

Key Findings:

This policy brief focuses on three main areas of intervention by ActionAid partners:

1. **Protection** – including women’s protection and reflections on the relevance of women-led action in protection responses.
2. **Dignified living** – including basic needs, education, employment and access to basic information.
3. **Discrimination and racism** – including the double standards in accessing human rights and the relevance of an intersectional and intergenerational approach.

Each section presents first the context, and then the main challenges that partners are facing, followed by specific examples of their adaptive and responsive strategies. All three topics are interconnected, and bring to the forefront the importance of holding equitable partnerships and funding streams. The final section describes overarching recommendations in these three areas.



Refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, at a Polish-Ukrainian border where ActionAid partner PAH (Polish Humanitarian Action) was operating (Simona Supino/ActionAid).

1. Women and girl's protection

From decades of experience, ActionAid knows that disasters, humanitarian crises and conflicts have a disproportionate effect on women and girls.²¹ Gender-based violence increases during all emergencies, but especially during armed conflict and displacement. In the case of Ukraine, women and girls make up the majority of displaced people while also being exposed to disproportionately higher risks of violence.²² Women and girls in neighbouring countries are also feeling the effects of the war in Ukraine, as all of ActionAid's partners in the region have reported an increase of protection issues since the conflict escalated. The exacerbation of gender inequalities is particularly felt by women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination.²³

1.1 Gender-Based Violence:

Since the escalated invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 and the subsequent regional refugee crisis, GBV has been a major concern.²⁴ OCHA estimates that in 2023 alone, 3.6 million people (57% IDPs, 27% returnees, 16% non-displaced people) will require GBV support, including prevention, risk mitigation and response services in Ukraine and neighbouring countries – with 90% of those in need being women and girls.²⁵ Numerous forms of GBV have been reported, including intimate partner violence, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse (including Conflict-Related Sexual Violence-CRSV). Women and girls who have either been displaced or are on the move are at particular risk. Bomb shelters, border crossings and transit centres have been highlighted as high-risk areas.²⁶

'Domestic violence and gender-based violence in Ukraine did not disappear anywhere, [it] became aggravated by sexual violence connected with conflict'
Member of NGO Girls²⁷, Ukraine

However, as of February 2023, data and information on GBV remains insufficient and underreported to gain an accurate picture of the full spectrum of risks and intersecting forms of violence. GBV services and systems for reporting, such as to the police or UN Blue Dot hubs²⁸ are not always fit for purpose due to lack of support services and limited accessibility for women and girls with increased diverse needs. Cultural norms

and stigma have led to a culture of silence within Ukraine and neighbouring countries. For the many women and girls who have fled conflict, former support networks such as their friends and family, or trusted formal mechanisms, have disappeared. In some of the border countries, the high cost of certain forms of healthcare and language barriers have also prevented women and girls from adequately accessing support.²⁹

1.2 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

EU legislations require EU Member States to offer emergency health care to refugees who have fled from Ukraine at the same level as their own citizens and long-term residents. However, some countries do not define certain forms of sexual and reproductive healthcare as essential.³⁰ This has raised concerns with supporting the many women and girls fleeing Ukraine in need of sexual and reproductive healthcare – especially as some refugees from Ukraine do not have Ukrainian passports and have faced additional discrimination in accessing healthcare, and SRHR in particular, in some neighbouring countries.

Access to sexual and reproductive health services have also been deprioritised by international agencies and humanitarian actors in their humanitarian response,³¹ with some partner organisations stressing that donor funding can sometimes sideline women and girls' protection and healthcare needs, making it difficult to integrate SRHR within programme plans. In Ukraine, especially in regions near active conflict, medical personnel and medications may be absent or difficult to access. This is particularly challenging for pregnant women who are unable to access good-quality obstetric care, or for trans and intersex people who may not be able to access regular hormone therapy.³² The exclusion of Roma people from registering for medical services and medicines due to their lack of the required documents has worsened since the escalation of the war.

As of February 2023, the World Health Organization had verified 802 attacks on healthcare in Ukraine, making the situation even worse.³³

1.3 Trafficking in human beings

The rapid and unpredictable nature of the full-scale invasion meant that many refugees fled without any idea of what to do next. In the first few months of the war, refugees arrived in neighbouring countries in need of immediate relief and seeking any support possible. As the invasion also caught the government and international community off guard, there was a high level of confusion, and ActionAid and partners witnessed a lack of systematic registration or safeguarding mechanisms in place at transit or border crossings.

While trafficking in human beings was one risk highlighted quite early during the conflict, the information on the ground was presented as sensationalist headlines and without actionable steps. Anecdotal evidence of traffickers at the border dissuaded Ukrainian women from leaving conflict-affected areas for fear of being kidnapped when crossing the borders. This was matched with the concern around identification matrices and limited anti-trafficking measures.

“If traffickers were only dubious people trying to snatch vulnerable women and children by force, our job would be made much easier, because they would be obvious to spot. However, from our intervention, what we have seen is that traffickers look like the concerned host who wants to help because they have children the same age, the family doctor who has a special interest in people caring for terminally ill patients. Anti-trafficking responses need to include actionable information, preventative action and clear alternatives in order to work
Member of eLiberare³⁴, Romania”

The risks generated by the war also overlapped with country profiles that already presented a high risk of trafficking, such as Romania being one of the main source countries for victims of human trafficking within the EU. Lack of proactive screening at border crossings and at refugee facilities only made identification of potential human trafficking victims even more difficult.

“What we [were] seeing [at the start of the war] was a catastrophe. We have had reports from our networks and voluntary workers on the borders that men are turning up with no identification to offer women transport or accommodation”
- Member of Feminoteka³⁵, Poland.

The limited feasibility to prepare and set up systematic registration or safeguarding mechanisms at the initial emergency response created significant opportunities for traffickers,³⁶ targeting single mothers and unaccompanied children, with non-Ukrainian citizens and women with disabilities finding themselves at greater risk, as they have more limited options for accessible transportation and increased discrimination. However, there is limited disaggregated data on trafficking, despite the setup of Blue Dot Hubs along border transit routes and in urban areas for refugees. Lack of clarity on this figure to date, and missing unaccompanied and separated children are deeply concerning. A Ukrainian refugee in Romania said:

‘The scariest part was also hearing stories of children missing at the beginning of the war. Horrible. The fear of trying to escape, thinking about losing your home, your husband, and also your child. I have heard of missing or kidnapped children. Where are they now?’

It is important to note that the risk for human trafficking grows proportionately with the continuation of the conflict. Correlating global data on trafficking shows that 95% of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation are women and children, which represents over 90% of the Ukrainian refugee population. Humanitarian responses need to continue to prioritise an anti-trafficking component in the protection responses deployed on the ground. With savings dwindling, job offers not being matched by childcare opportunities and humanitarian infrastructure being gradually reduced in neighbouring countries, a massive vulnerable population is left behind if preventing and combating human trafficking does not remain a priority.

1.4 Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

High levels of psychological distress associated with the conflict and family separation are being reported in Ukraine and host countries, leading to an increased demand for MHPSS. The lack of access to initial psychological first aid in the wake of the beginning stages of the war and subsequent displacement has also led to worsening mental health conditions. These reports include adults experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety attacks, sleep disturbances, and extreme fear about the future. ActionAid's partner organisation in Poland, Kuchnia Konflikty³⁷ (Conflict Kitchen), said:

'The need for psychological and psychiatric support is bigger than before. Before it was an emergency, people were not acknowledging they need [mental and psychosocial] support – but in recent months... we have seen an increase of suicidal calls and needing to go to the hospital. It is the trauma which they held for a long time, which is now becoming a reality.'

Other causes of psychological distress include women feeling 'shame' at leaving their male relatives, and older persons we spoke to expressed fear about dying away from their home country, and guilt at being safe in a neighbouring country when knowing other relatives may not be. Third country nationals and LGBTQIA+ communities also revealed feeling additional stress from elements of exclusion, discrimination and racism they experienced when fleeing conflict-affected regions.

1.5 Importance of Women-Led Action in Protection Response

Despite the many concerns around women's protection for those fleeing active conflict in Ukraine, the international response has been criticised as being gender-insensitive, as the support and focus around women's protection in the programming response does not meet the needs.³⁸ The reality is, as of January 2023, protection remains underfunded in Ukraine, with 15.4 million people in need of protection (out of the total 17.6 million people in need) and funds only covering 62.7% of the protection needs.

This is in stark comparison to funds supporting other essential needs which to date have been covered at 82% for food security and livelihoods needs, 123% education and 216% of needs in coordination services in the Ukraine Response.³⁹ Access to services for women and girls, and support for the diverse needs of women and girls continue to be overlooked, as the funding gap is larger than other sectors and the needs are disproportionate.

This lack of recognition on the importance of women and girl's protection is often the result of the international community not working closely with women and their organisations who understand the specific risks that women and girls face in emergencies. Some WROs working with ActionAid felt that their voices were not heard by donors, who did not seem to be flexible or consider responding in a human-rights based approach, instead focusing heavily on value for money. This was explained further by a partner in Ukraine:

'Donors focus on the quantitative indexes and not on the quality and impact of their response. We explained that we need to support a woman with a wheelchair, which would amount to USD 300 and they responded "Are you sure that this is a good investment – to invest, approximately, USD 300 in a single woman. Could we not buy some food kits for ten people?" Sure, we can. But when you do this, your projects don't have deep impact and don't support differential rights.'

Member of NGO Girls, Ukraine.

The international community must go beyond the traditional, often simplistic, humanitarian discourse on GBV and instead imbed intersectional ways of responding to the ongoing conflict. Local and national civil society, specifically WROs, WLOs, and young people's groups have had to step up where international actors did not, to address the needs and barriers to accessing equitable support. Due to their extensive experience and localised knowledge, these groups are best positioned to build the solutions girls and women need.⁴⁰

The following protection initiatives are key elements of ActionAid's and partners' responses to ensure that gendered intersectional analyses are systematically integrated into humanitarian operational approaches:

- **Women's Dignity at Humanitarian Distribution Points:** Our partners working on humanitarian aid points and first assistance ensure considerations around **women's dignity**. In Ukraine, Insight,⁴¹ Legalife⁴² and NGO Girls provide monthly hygiene kits for women and girls, while in Poland, Romania, and Moldova, partners Polish Women's Strike,⁴³ DEIS⁴⁴ and ROMNI⁴⁵ tailor their support to individual women's needs.
- **Trafficking Prevention & Dignified Journeys:** A range of our partners work to identify **trafficking risks**. In Romania, partner eLiberare provides **safe journey** maps to individuals fleeing conflict as well signposting to specialised services. Network partner, Campaign Against Homophobia⁴⁶, works to support organisations in Poland and Ukraine to address the **immediate protection and assistance needs of LGBTQIA+** persons.
- **Prevention and response to GBV:** In Ukraine, partner Legalife provides psychosocial and legal support to GBV survivors. In Poland, partner Feminoteka works with survivors of GBV, including funding trauma therapists fluent in Ukrainian, Polish and English, and social workers who can provide referrals for jobs, accommodation and further support. Partners CSMC-Romanian Women's Lobby⁴⁷ and Insight, based in Romania and Ukraine respectively, run helplines staffed by women who can speak Ukrainian, as well as offering confidential referrals to legal and/or psychological support.

- **MHPSS Support:** In addition to hotlines for GBV survivors, ActionAid partners hold Psychosocial support sessions. In Poland, Polish Women's Strike provides a mental health service for newcomers experiencing Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Egala⁴⁸ supports individual and group therapy sessions for mental wellbeing. This is offered in Ukraine by Insight, Legalife and Sphere⁴⁹, who provide psychosocial support to survivors and victims of war, in particular to women, sex workers and LGBTQIA+ population. MHPSS services are matched in coordination with additional specialist services, where partner Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health (HealthRight),⁵⁰ support increased awareness around HIV+ and at-risk women in getting preventive and outreach treatment support they can find. In Romania, Fundația Națională pentru Tineret⁵¹ (FNT) developed youth friendly spaces for young people fleeing the war from Ukraineto create alternatives and positive opportunities for leisure and build a community-based protective network around them.
- **Safe Shelters** for survivors of **GBV** for all refugees – no matter their background or ethnicity – have also been prioritised. In Poland, Kuchnia Konflikту, and in Romania, partner organisation ADRA⁵² also operate **child friendly spaces**. In Ukraine, HealthRight and NGO Girls, host both short and long-term safe shelters for women and girls, while partner Insight, provide safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ and women refugees fleeing the conflict and both Insight and Vostok SOS⁵³ support relocation for vulnerable groups as needed.

The above snapshot of women-led community-based protection responses and does not encompass the full protection response ActionAid and partners are undertaking in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. ActionAid continues to have conversations around supporting a long-term post-conflict strategy, linked to emerging **women, peace, and security**, and they support the leadership of women and WLOs in current and post-conflict planning and processes.

Gender-insensitive responses cannot meet the basic needs and protection concerns of all the refugees and IDPs affected by the war in Ukraine. That's why ActionAid seeks to work directly with

those affected, in collaboration with WROs, WLOs and young people's groups, to ensure that the specific lived experiences of all people using an intersectional approach that acknowledges their intersecting identities including but not limited to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, etc. Specifically, the approach aims to build women's individual and collective power, transform systems, and strengthen access to rights, services and resources.

Women are trained to be facilitators of a series of practical tools, which can be used to identify protection risks and solutions, as well as advocating for their rights at national, local and government levels.

ActionAid's Feminist Approach to Protection in Emergencies Guiding Principles:

Women-led

Providing space and equipping diverse women and girls to have a lead role and decision making in the humanitarian response.

Community-based

Applying a rights based approach where the community meaningfully participates and is recognised as an agent for change, not a passive beneficiary

Transformative

Addressing root causes to affect long-term and lasting change.

Holistic

Recognising that wellbeing, safety and the realisation of rights require a range of programme options and service providers, and facilitating these linkages.

Non-linear

Responding across the humanitarian/development nexus, as and when the opportunity arises for preparedness, response and resilience building.

Intersectional

Analysing converging axes of oppression that compound vulnerability for women of diverse backgrounds (e.g race, class, disability, SOGI) and applying this information to ensure effective targeting and accessible services and support.



Ukrainian Refugee Family who fled the war as their city was under threat of being bombed speaking to ActionAid staff. They took four buses, a ferry and crossed from Isaccea, the southernmost border of the Romanian-Ukrainian border. (Alexandra Radu Stanescu/ActionAid).



Veronika, a volunteer at Insight NGO an ActionAid partner, with her daughter Daniela at the Insight hub (Anastasia Vlasova / ActionAid).

2. Dignified living

In 2021, two percent of the population of Ukraine were living in poverty. They had fewer chances to have access to a dignified living, benefiting from quality education, accommodation, and healthcare as well as adequate social protection and jobs in the formal sector. The war in Ukraine could make that this number could rise to as high as 55% by the end this year.⁵⁴ It has also contributed to a cost-of-living crisis across the globe, substantially hiking up prices on international markets for fuel, food and fertilisers as the demand increases and the supply is cut and disproportionately impacting local communities in the Global South.⁵⁵ Ukraine's corn, wheat, barley and sunflower oil, which accounts for a fifth of the world's supply is no longer accessible and has hit countries in the East Africa region hardest; Somalia used to import 90% of its wheat from Ukraine, in an area that has already suffered a prolonged extreme drought.⁵⁶ Food insecurity compounds pre-existing poverty, with an estimated 1.7 billion people at risk of living in poverty as a result of this crisis.⁵⁷

This crisis has been exacerbated by the unjust effect of COVID-19 pandemic containment measures and vaccination, an environmentally unsustainable food and agricultural system, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, increasing number of conflicts and imposed austerity and fiscal consolidation measures. Again, this situation is disproportionately impacting women, who already suffer income disparities and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in accessing key productive resources, housing, and appropriate health services.⁵⁸ Women are caring for children and the elderly, with their needs increased through these overlapping crises. There are also more likely to work in the informal sector and on the frontlines of the response, for example in heavily feminised sectors such as paid care work and nursing, or other precarious work conditions and short-term contracts leading to multiple health-related and economic risks. Humanitarian distribution and public services often do not cover these needs.

This is because women, especially women of colour, undocumented women and women with disabilities, are not in the political and decision-making spaces to highlight these specific needs and rights. Women are compensating for this lack of care, for example, by skipping meals to help children and older relatives. This is happening today across the globe, from Ukraine to Somalia, from the United Kingdom to Lebanon.

**“At this stage of our lives is important for us to have a peaceful sky, a peaceful place to live.”
mentioned a Ukrainian woman refugee in Poland with her 11-year daughter.**

2.1 Livelihoods and Sustainable Living Solutions

Women in Ukraine suffer a 22% gender pay gap and 32% pension gap.⁵⁹ They also shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work in households. Married women in Ukraine spend an average of 24.6 hours per week on domestic work, compared to 14.5 hours for married men.⁶⁰ This has increased since the Russian invasion. For example, the closure of schools for security reasons has created additional unpaid care work.

As with the COVID-19 pandemic, women bore the brunt of looking after children staying at home and of home schooling, leaving women with few alternatives to leaving their paid position of employment. The war is also pushing more women to jobs in the informal sector, to spend their savings to help themselves or others in need, and to give up paid work as they escape from conflict.

This loss in livelihoods, combined with increased rent, energy, and electricity prices in Ukraine and unequal access to finance, resources, and services, is making more difficult for women to access safe and dignified accommodation. Within Ukraine, around two thirds of the population displaced by the war live with relatives, friends, or in rented housing.⁶¹ Ukraine’s neighbouring countries have hosted the people escaping the war in Ukraine through a combination of government-run and privately-run shelters and individual private homes offered by citizens of the host country.⁶² Temporary accommodation run by private providers and strangers do not always provide a dignified space for living, have much more limited services and assistance – such as psychosocial support, registration, medical support, and case management - and increase the protection risks for women and girls when they rely on unvetted individuals.



ActionAid Staff pictured at sports and recreation center in Chelm, Poland being used as a reception centre (Simona Supino/ActionAid).

The LGBTQIA+ community also experience discrimination when accessing to housing, increasing their protection risk; trans men and trans women and non-binary people, as well as couples who do not fit heteronormative expectations are denied housing and access to shelters for refugees, and are exposed to a higher risk of physical and sexual violence. This extends to opportunities to accessible livelihoods as employer in host communities are less likely to offer them employment, also leaving these communities at greater risk of exploitation, poverty and precarious and potentially risky work, such as sex work, as an alternative mechanism to earn a living. According to a report carried out in 2022 by ILGA-Europe, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, the status of LGBTQIA+ rights in Poland is the worst among EU countries. Although Polish law bans discrimination 'on the basis of sexual orientation', this excludes gender identity, and enforcement has proven to be ineffective in practice.⁶³

Roma and other ethnic minority groups are also excluded from offers of temporary and permanent housing, due to the intersecting barriers of racism and their lack of civil status documentation. In the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review,⁶⁴ the Polish state authorities describe Roma as one of the groups most at risk of discrimination and socio-economic exclusion, and this persists today. Roma in Council of Europe member states, which includes Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, and Romania, were living in conditions which fall far below the minimum standards for adequate housing in insecure and often segregated accommodation. This pre-war situation is due to widespread direct and indirect discrimination and leads to major barriers to education, employment and health.⁶⁵

2.2 Education and Employment Opportunities

The impact of conflict had disrupted education for more than five million girls and boys since the invasion.⁶⁶ In Ukraine, thousands of schools and other educational institutions have been damaged or destroyed.⁶⁷ In conflict-affected areas, classes have also decreased due to fear of bombings or inability to access school buildings. The switch to online classes is made more difficult by regular attacks on energy infrastructure which have caused occasional widespread blackouts. In neighbouring countries, UNICEF estimates that 2 out of 3 refugee children are not currently enrolled in host country education systems.⁶⁸ This is a combination of

language barriers and difficulties in integration. A refugee woman in Romania stressed:

'I worry about my daughter's future. She can only access some translated classes and others are available online, but this is not the same. Who will give her a certificate? How will this education pass on to the system back home in Ukraine?'

The disruption of children's education on child protection, including the difficulties integrating due to trauma and unequal access to technology, has a gendered dimension which has not been sufficiently analysed. Humanitarian actors have made little distinction in the analyses between the needs and experiences of girls and boys from different age groups, including adolescents, whose education has been disrupted this year.

Women and young refugees arriving in neighbouring countries are making long-term plans, as the war and reconstruction efforts are likely to last some time. In addition to education concerns, Ukrainian refugees do not know if their previous employment experience will be accepted in their host countries. Refugees also mentioned experiencing language barriers, difficulty in accessing information, limited job markets, high unemployment rates, and, for women, the difficulty of juggling care responsibilities with other tasks.⁶⁹

"Lack of economic opportunities is also very much relevant to IDPs women . You have had to leave your own home. You do not have a job. You have to rent an apartment and to stay somewhere. You have to have money to eat,"
explains a representative of Ukrainian Women's Fund,⁷⁰ an ActionAid Partner in Ukraine.

Neighbouring countries across the region have ensured and facilitated legal access to employment.⁷¹ However, third country nationals, LGBTQIA+ community members and Roma people fleeing Ukraine suffer additional difficulties in accessing jobs in those countries. In Moldova, for example, Roma women and girls face education and employment barriers, stemming from strong patriarchal attitudes.⁷²



Natalia, a volunteer at Insight NGO, shows a video with her destroyed apartment on the top floor of the building in Irpin (Anastasia Vlasova/ActionAid).

2.3 Importance of Resilience-Building in Emergencies

ActionAid and partners' response to the Ukraine crisis focused on access to basic services, and prioritised avoiding discrimination, and contributing to gender and social justice, as well as support for policy and advocacy around their long-term resilience and sustainability solutions. Again, WLO, WRO and young-led partners stepped up to respond in solidarity beyond traditional live-saving services, to ensure a more dignified and sustainable living of the many people who have had to be displaced or flee Ukraine.

- In Romania, Migrant Integration Center Brasov⁷³, focused on ensuring refugees' access to an independent, safe and decent living standard, has provided multipurpose vouchers for refugees and assisted children with school supply packages. The association Mai Bine⁷⁴

combined its mandate on sustainable development with the humanitarian action, providing ecological meals to refugees in transit, based on local producers and recovered food. The ROUA Community Centre, set up by ActionAid's partner DEIS, provides Ukrainian refugees with activities that facilitate their access to health, education, employment and accommodation. Crucially, the refugees have ownership of the space. DEIS used its skills and experience from its core mission, supporting marginalised and at-risk young people, to run the project and reach more marginalised refugees, as the first refugee groups were largely middle-class Ukrainians. ActionAid complemented this grassroots work with an advocacy campaign to strengthen women's engagement and leadership in peacebuilding processes across Europe, together with different partners in the region.

- In Poland, ActionAid joined forces with WLOs providing education programming (Dom Otwarty,⁷⁵ Fundacja Polza),⁷⁶ food and non-food items (Polish Women’s Strike), legal advice (Polish Women’s Strike) with particular attention to third country nationals (Fundacja dla Somali) ⁷⁷ and a hostel group in Warsaw (Kuchnia Konfliktu). The partnership with Polish Humanitarian Action,⁷⁸ an international NGO based in Poland, involved a multisectoral approach with multi-purpose cash and emergency assistance at the Polish-Ukrainian border. The mobilisation, activism and solidarity of Polish women’s organisations and movements has been essential to navigate the Government’s restrictive environment for women and discriminatory attitudes on non-polish nationals from government. Third country nationals do not necessarily qualify for the same benefits on right to work as Ukrainians. The Polish WLOs have provided information and services to everyone, independently regardless of their gender, origin, and identity.
- In Moldova, the Roma community worked to welcome and support Roma refugees. Young Roma women and girls play a key role. They bring “strength, energy and creativity” to organisations like Roma Women Platform (ROMNI) and Roma Awareness Foundation⁷⁹ (RAF). ROMNI and RAF have been leading Roma women and community rights struggles for decades in Moldova. Since the Ukraine invasion, they have expanded their efforts to support Roma refugees in finding dignified accommodation and access to civil status documents, health, and education in Moldova. ActionAid supports them in the response, as well as ensuring that they maintain capacity for supporting resident Roma communities in Moldova.
- In Ukraine, partner-led livelihood opportunities by NGO Girls include training on finances management and driving school lessons to access safe spaces accommodation and potential employment opportunities. The young-people led organization STAN⁸⁰ is proactively involving young people (both IDPs and locals) into social cohesion and non-formal educational activities to promote a peaceful society, fight discrimination and boost inclusion of young IDPs and excluded groups

War in Ukraine is making clear that the conflict is affecting the poorest and most at risk people in greatest numbers, with a feminist intersectional lens. Roma, LGBTQIA+, sex workers, women of colour, and third country nationals were already denied their right for a dignified living and displacement and disruption of services and livelihoods created by the war is affecting them in a disproportionate manner. It is important also to have an intergenerational lens and consider age, as older people reported difficulty accessing trusted information or assistance and services.⁸¹ Around 20% of Ukraine population is 65 or over, most of whom are women. This is the largest percentage of older persons affected by conflict in a single country.⁸² While important to address immediate needs, it is necessary to consider how intersectional needs differ, and what steps are needed to shift power and influence factors which may increase marginalisation of some communities. An essential aspect of this is to understand and consider medium to long-term sustainable plans. Women’s rights and women and young people leadership are at the core of this, working closely with those most at needs to ensure their sustainable and dignified future. And yet, our survey findings indicated that from the respondent organisations, less than 30% receive funding to support medium to long-term activities.

To address this, ActionAid’s work with partners in Ukraine and neighbouring countries is based in this resilience framework.⁸³ It is an alternative to the conventional development and humanitarian paradigm by working towards strengthening the ability of people and communities to recognise, challenge and transform the power structures that dictate their vulnerability. This resilience building approach is the rationale behind the partnerships established in Ukraine and neighbouring countries with progressive and transformative civil society organisations. The partnership and collaboration during this emergency will hopefully reinforce their long-term aim of achieving equal and just power while conducting activities in the four areas of the framework: realising human rights and access to basic services; gaining awareness, knowledge and skills; developing collective action and partnership; and strengthening institutions and influencing policy.



Alina* (named changed), aged 27, refugee with two young children (ActionAid UK).

3. Discrimination and racism

We must not pretend that we don't see some people who are in need. All people must be treated equally.

Fundacja dla Somalii, Poland

Despite the commitments of Ukraine and the neighbouring countries made with many United Nations treaties,⁸⁴ discrimination, "the act of making unjustified distinctions between human beings based on the groups, classes, or other categories to which they are perceived to belong",⁸⁵ remains a poignant reality for many people, especially women who belong to excluded groups and communities, such as Roma population, LGBTQIA+ people, and third country nationals. The response of society, institutions and the international community to Russia's invasion in February 2022 of Ukraine has deepened this discrimination.

3.1 Double Standards: Human Rights and Equity for all Refugees

The European Union opened its borders to Ukrainian refugees as never before for people fleeing an armed conflict,⁸⁶ as the European Council quickly activated the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time since its inception in 2001.⁸⁷ Thanks to this Directive, displaced Ukrainian nationals are enjoying the right to free movement within the EU, as well as residency rights, social welfare assistance, medical care, access to housing, to education, and to employment⁸⁸ This is a stark contrast to the mistreatment of people of colour fleeing Ukraine,⁸⁹ as since the very onset of the crisis, multiple complaints were raised on the differential treatment of people at the borders on the grounds of nationality, gender or colour.⁹⁰

The protection offered by the Council Directive is a "gold standard"⁹¹ and could represent a precedent for

a fairer migratory policy. However, it broadly applies to white Ukrainians with biometric passports, and it is unfortunately limited and discretionary towards other fleeing groups including Roma population, stateless people, and third country nationals.⁹² In Poland, one young woman stressed:

**The world is a cruel place.
People are being segregated
according to their nationality (...)
If you are Ukrainian, you can live
there for a month or two, as long
as needed. But if you are Roma or
Arab, you are outcast.**

In Moldova, for instance, Roma population fleeing the conflict, are automatically segregated to differentiated reception centres, with fewer resources and services than white Ukrainian refugee centres. For Roma people in particular, the language barrier, and their lack of digital skills and smartphones, make it even more difficult to understand their legal rights and real opportunities for protection.

Similarly, for migrants and asylum seekers previously residing in Ukraine's neighbouring countries, who had – and still have – to go through complex bureaucratic processes to access rights and services, the 'fast track' policy offered to Ukrainian refugees does not apply to them either. In that sense, for some of them it is a contradiction to identify people who enjoy the protection of the directive as "refugees". ActionAid's partner Fundacja dla Somalii from Poland explained this as:

'There is injustice when looking at the exception and definitions used around refugees in Europe. When you say one person is a refugee from Syria, from Afghanistan, or from Somalia, they are treated differently to how a refugee is seen from Ukraine.'

Providing some displaced population with the full protection of the Council Directive, and others with no protection or partial support, is causing distress and uncertainty, in particular for those belonging to excluded groups. Even for these which do benefit from protection measures there is nevertheless insecurity, as they begin to assess with fear and uncertainty what will happen to them, under which protection scheme they would fall, if the European

Union decides to terminate or not extend the implementation of the Directive⁹³ in particular with regards a scenario that could become a protracted conflict or crisis.

Refugees experiencing discrimination is also a major issue in host countries, in particular for people who experience multiple discrimination based on gender, race, class, sexuality or ability categories. More than 1,100 people, who fled Ukraine and are now living in Moldova, Romania or Poland supported by partner organisations, reported to an ActionAid needs assessment that discrimination is their third biggest challenge, after lack of dignified living conditions and communication and language difficulties.⁹⁴

3.3 Importance of an intersectional and intergenerational approach

ActionAid's Partner-Based Response, and the intersectional and intergenerational components of our Humanitarian Signature, lead to partnerships with organisations led by and/or directly working with the most excluded groups in society. These partner organisations were already fighting discrimination before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in particular WLOs, WROs, young people-led, Roma, LGBTQIA+, sex workers and diaspora/migrant-led organisations, they were created inside marginalised communities to respond to the rights, needs and demands of their members. The decision of these organisations to add the humanitarian intervention to what was already their previous work, has been key in protecting the rights of already previously marginalised people⁹⁵ who are often largely forgotten by institutions, donors and, in general, the international community, and whose needs and risks only increased with the conflict. At the same time, this has put more responsibility, stress and workload on the organisations' staff. For example, Legalife, from Ukraine had to shift from pre-invasion core work⁹⁶ advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work⁹⁷ into an action plan to accompany members of their community to ensure they get access to basic services such as health and medication or legal support.

"Nevertheless, on the other hand, women, have larger burden. Because, naturally, nobody has abolished the gender roles, duties, and volunteer work, in addition... becoming then an extra burden," explains ActionAid's partner in Ukraine, Legalife.

They further identified a shift with government officials and other stakeholders who were once open becoming focused on other priorities. Similarly, many WROs and WLOs from Ukraine have reported a growing institutional and social backlash on women's rights and other intersecting agendas, stressing that:

'People just don't understand that ... prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable people, it will give these groups more rights, but will not take any rights away from anybody else'.

Representative of Insight, Ukraine

For these organisations, a detailed understanding of national and international law frameworks – as well as human rights – is a way to address instances of discrimination. Leadership training can also support the transformation of service users towards becoming agents of change, especially marginalised groups like sex workers, Roma women, or LGBTQIA+ communities understand that political representation can be crucial to fighting discrimination from the inside.

ActionAid's partners in Ukraine and neighbouring countries have also fight discrimination creating more interaction spaces between different groups to promote the inclusion of marginalised groups:

- In Ukraine, in their Lviv hub, Insight promotes social integration events for LGBTQIA+ and female refugees
- In Romania, DEIS is promoting exchanges between Ukrainian displaced youth with Romanian marginalised groups of young people. LOGS,⁹⁸ with experience on the inclusion of vulnerable groups of migrants, has supported groups of Ukrainian single mothers with intercultural activities and worked to promote local cooperation in the field of migration
- In Moldova, ROMNI has shifted their limited resources to assist Roma Ukrainian displaced population, while also actively promoting sharing spaces between Roma groups with non-Roma population from Ukraine and from Moldova, including for young people. RAF is raising awareness on Roma population rights, also facilitating dialogue and mutual understanding with non-Roma communities, through their Romano Patrîn 103,6 FM online radio⁹⁹
- In Poland, Kuchnia Konfliktu, through former beneficiaries is offering dance classes for people from Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and other countries – creating a safe space for real interaction and integration.



Founder and members of Kuchnia Konfliktu (Conflict Kitchen): a social initiative which aims to support refugees and migrants within Poland to find work by offering fair terms of employment and training, while also working to break down stereotypes (ActionAid UK).

4. Transforming the humanitarian system: equitable partnerships and funding streams

Engaging with national and local civil society – specifically WROs, WLOs and young people organisations – is critical for the success and sustainability of humanitarian action and is part of the Grand Bargain commitments made by donors and humanitarian actors. This is particularly evident in Ukraine, where the inclusion of such organisations is necessary to effectively address inequalities around women’s protection and promote fair and dignified living to shift norms and access those most in need.

ActionAid knows that civil society groups are leading humanitarian action across all four countries in which ActionAid is working to respond to the Ukraine Crisis (Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Poland). And yet, we are seeing a repeat of damaging humanitarian structures, whereby the expertise of national civil society agency and action is not recognised.

The leading role of WROs, WLOs and young people’s organisation does not get the recognition it deserves, with these groups often remaining siloed and not invited to formal decision-making processes with international and government actors. This is despite the courageous acts of women leaders and their organisations, who may even be displaced themselves:

‘I am a woman. I am a woman refugee. I am an internally displaced person. I am a woman who has her apartment destroyed in Irpin. I am a woman who evacuated with my children through the border during the first days...But I am also a woman who is responding. 90% of my team are women, 60% of them are the women who are internally displaced once or twice.’

Member of NGO Girls, Ukraine.

In these contexts, ActionAid’s partners have emphasised that building stronger links and joint solidarity inside their own organisations is strategic to survive and transform. WROs and WLOs have therefore personally invested time and resources for their former service users to become more engaged volunteers, staff members and agents of change in the organisation that supported them. This is facilitated by democratic and participatory processes inside the organisations, based on their feminist leadership principles.

We still have this very safe space (in our organization) where we can go back to, and just see there are like-minded people, there are activists, there is still people who has fire in their eyes, and that’s the bigger support...because you know sparkles travel from one person to another person, and when I have bad days, and come here and my days get better.

Women’s March,¹⁰⁰ Ukraine

Despite the individual time, energy and resources spent to respond and grow, civil society groups have reported that they had to pool their own resources, respond to requests outside of their normal activities, and incrementally expand their reach. Funding is exclusively short-term and tied to donor expectations, instead of being based on consultations with those in need, and often not discussed with national and local organisations.

In fact, from the WROs, WLOs and young-people organisation who responded to our survey, 65% have stressed that donors do not fund their organisation’s core mission and activities. Instead, funding is side-lined and sent only for activities pertaining to immediate humanitarian action.

In addition the survey revealed the two most important needs for civil society organisations are:

- 100% of respondents needed more flexible and equitable forms of funding and partnership (in terms of amount of money, possibility to choose and change the spending chapters, less bureaucracy, possibility to support structural needs of the organisation, sharing overhead costs, etc.)
- 80% of respondents asked for a greater presence of grassroots and national organisations in national and international decision-making spaces of the humanitarian response.

Despite the international commitment to fund national and local civil society, only 12 out of 65 Grand Bargain Signatories reported meeting or exceeding the target of providing 25% of their funding to local and national actors as directly as possible in 2022.¹⁰¹ In reality, Financial Tracking Service data shows that only 2% of global humanitarian funds in 2021 were given to local and national responders as directly as possible. This is mirrored in the Ukraine response, where current data is indicating that only 12% of funding is not going through UN agencies and International NGOS.¹⁰²

Addressing the presence of grassroots and national organisations in international decision-making spaces is not something that is external to the system. Stakeholders also identify a lack of proactivity by UN agencies and INGOs to create inclusive participatory spaces. Challenges highlighted by WROs, WLOs and other excluded

groups in the Ukraine crisis include the cluster system being structured in complex ways, very frequent and timely consuming meetings, lack of provision of translation and support, and lack of understanding of the humanitarian sector. Making a shift towards truly welcoming and inclusive spaces would require a supplementary effort by the international community, but would definitely be a step forward towards the inclusion of more national voices.

We are talking all the time about localization, but sometimes we are failing in our own groups, we have to acknowledge that is also something related to us, as INGOs and UN agencies
INGO Anonymous Contribution

Despite the growing evidence showcasing the valuable skills of diverse local women in humanitarian action, plans to reform the humanitarian sector still fall short of meaningfully shifting power to WROs and WLOs within disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.¹⁰³ When women and their organisations are put in the centre of humanitarian action, a more effective, inclusive and efficient humanitarian response stands in place to support the whole community. It enhances humanitarian action, upholds the rights of communities and provides a powerful entry point to challenge negative power structures.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion & recommendations

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, discrimination and GBV has severely increased. Women and girls are facing multiple forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, whilst simultaneously facing increasing barriers in accessing basic -and sometimes lifesaving- healthcare services. This, alongside the challenges of securing livelihood opportunities, such as education, employment, and justice (reparation), hampers their prospects towards a safe and dignified life. This violence intersects with the discrimination experienced in light of their ethnic backgrounds, religion, identity, age, disability and social constraints, highlighting the need to hold gender-transformative and conflict sensitive responses.

And yet 'now is not the time for women's rights' is what many WRO and WLO partners, including from further excluded groups have been told.

This message is being reiterated in national and local conversations, programme discussions, and even in dialogues on how best to ensure that women's rights and gender equality are mainstreamed and addressed in the Ukraine Recovery Plan. This statement implies that gender equality is something expendable, secondary and irrelevant, instead of principle in addressing basic human rights and guaranteeing life-saving assistance and protection services that reach those most marginalised and excluded.

ActionAid and partners say it is ALWAYS the right time for women's rights. This is even more important because, as we have seen, women and girls are not only the most impacted by conflict and crisis, but that are also critical agents of change who lead gender-transformative activities in times of crisis. Our findings have shown that women and girls are among the first responders, working from intersectional and intergenerational approaches alongside their communities to create systemic change and promote gender equality and social justice. Promoting women and their organisations to recognise and lead based off their capabilities – regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, religion, identity, age, disability or additional social constraints – supports the community to overcome barriers of discrimination and gender inequity, but also sustain long-term transformative change.

The report brings together the experiences of ActionAid and partners in aiding women's protection, livelihood and anti-discrimination, to showcase that these need to be addressed for a humanitarian response to be effective. Addressing these needs is essential in developing a humanitarian plan that will provide dignified living standards, respond to the intersectional protection needs of the community and support building transformative change.

It is important to understand that if we do not provide the space, recognition and agency for our WRO and WLO partners, this will be forgotten. Partners and affected communities must be included in key decision-making spaces to fight against patriarchal and exclusionary practices. Change, recovery, reconstruction, peace; none of these are possible without women.

This policy brief showcases the work that ActionAid's partner organisations are doing to address the needs of those most affected, putting rights, care and dignity at the centre of their work. We hope that, collectively, we can support a shift in the international humanitarian system towards one which ensures women, and in particular women from excluded groups, are stepping into positions of power and influence. We aim to affect this shift with the below recommendations:

Protection

To humanitarian actors (INGOs, donors and programme staff):

- 1. Humanitarian actors need to strengthen the linkages of emergency response and women's rights, by understanding that that the escalation of the war and the regional crisis impacts all forms of GBV.** Actions include:
 - a. Undertake conflict and gender analysis in conflict affected areas in order to understand the barriers and enablers of access to protection services. This analysis must be done in cooperation with local organisations and reflect that, in crises, SRHR and GBV services are often deprioritised and closed, leaving women and girls at greater risk.
 - b. Provide the necessary information for survivors of GBV, including SRHR, so that refugees or IDPs know where to seek refuge; access their legal rights; and locate support systems in Ukraine and neighbouring countries which are confidential, non-judgmental, and easily accessible in different languages (especially where referral mechanisms are not available).



Elena, Chair of ROMNI, in Moldova, at a research workshop with ActionAid, addressing key lessons learnt and challenges faced. (Jara Henar/ActionAid).

2. Integrate an intersectional gender perspective in all humanitarian responses and social protection measures to address the intersectional needs of the community. This means:

- a. Ensure a gender adviser supports the roll-out of programme activities to prioritise the protection of women and girls both at the onset of emergency response and in disaster planning and preparedness.
- b. Ensure in-kind assistance and food packages are developed with the women and girls in a community and tailored to their needs (for example, what to include in dignity kits may differ region from region).
- c. Ensure that needs assessments and ongoing response and recovery planning processes move beyond simply providing gender and age disaggregated data, and are guided by feminist principles that addresses power imbalance. Ensure that women, including women from excluded groups, are involved in the data collection. This will allow programmes to target approaches that account for people’s multiple identities and ensure that survivor-centred approaches are upheld and quality of care can be ensured for all.

3. **Analyse risks and safety challenges for women and girls, associated with the programme design.** This is critical to ensuring a coordinated approach to GBV risk mitigation, prevention and a context-specific response that responds to the dynamic nature of this crisis. This should include the integration of Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse measures including accessible and clear complaints and feedback mechanisms and expanding existing safe and friendly spaces for women and girls.
4. **Protect and enhance GBV and SRHR services through ring-fenced funding on women’s protection, in recognition of their essential services for women and girls.**

Dignified Living

To Governments providing assistance and protection to refugees:

1. Fund and launch programmes to **develop work skills** for refugees, especially excluded groups such as Roma, third country nationals and LGBTQIA+ people. This includes:
 - a. Training programmes to support the development of work skills, retraining and obtaining new professional skills needed in the labour market.



Legalife partner in Ukraine country at a research workshop with ActionAid, addressing key lessons learnt and challenges faced. This workshop took place in an underground shelter, amidst ongoing air strikes in Ukraine. (Jara Henar/ActionAid).

- b. Connecting job-seeking refugees to employment opportunities, through private and public partnerships with employment agencies.
 - c. Provide language training and consider integration of skillsets (e.g. recognising and validating job certificates or credentials).
2. Improve **inclusive and equitable education access** and learning opportunities for displaced children. This includes:
- a. Integration of children in host country's education system to ensure their educational attainment remains in accredited institutions.
 - b. Meeting the specific needs of displaced children from minority groups like Roma and third country nationals by adapting language classes.
 - c. Adequate infrastructure for schooling to host children with disabilities.
 - d. Provide access to appropriate technology if online learning is the primary option and consider options to mitigate women's unpaid care related to their children home-schooling.
- To Humanitarian Actors and Governments:**
- 1. Develop and support strategies to provide safe, dignified, non-exclusionary long-term housing across all border countries.
 - 2. Temporary shelters in conflict-affected Ukraine that safe, offer protection from winter conditions including by offering winter clothing, easily accessible and open to everyone.

Discrimination

To Governments:

1. Provide clear, consistent and reliable information on the services and support needed for legal services and information on temporary protection status and asylum for third country nationals, and non-Ukrainian passport holders. Lack of credible and trusted information exacerbates a culture of fear and inequity.
2. Promote anti-racism through the development of equity policies, which include:
 - a. End institutional racism and discrimination through staff trainings, in particular with the institutions who deliver support to citizens on the ground.
 - b. Hold consultation processes to ensure excluded groups can meaningfully participate in decision-making spaces, including facilitating information for illiterate Roma and third country nationals with limited access to services information.
 - c. Support political participation and leadership by marginalised groups, to ensure access to legislative and executive decision-making spaces for public policies aiming equal human rights access for WRO, WLO LGBTQIA+, sex worker communities, Roma and third country nationals.
 - d. Include compliance with the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation as part of the conversations on the EU pre-accession of Ukraine and Moldova.
3. Support the meaningful participation of WLOs, WROs and other organisations from excluded groups in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, including the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC 2023) scheduled in London on the 21-22 June 2023.

To humanitarian actors:

1. Commit to long-term partnerships with national organisations, in particular WROs and WLOs. Partner organisations are tired of international stakeholders offering tokenistic support, in particular with organisations supporting excluded groups.
2. Recognise that Roma, LGBTQIA+ people, people of colour and third country nationals already face discrimination across the region and they are likely to be most greatly impacted by the current crisis. Ensure in-depth intersectional and gender-conflict-analysis is undertaken, and collaborate with WROs, WLOs, LGBTQIA+ groups, sex workers and diaspora organisations to ensure programme activities address the needs of the most marginalised.

Qualitative Funding and Meaningful Partnerships

To humanitarian actors and donors

1. Partner with national and local organisations (such as WROs, WLOs and young people's groups) to ensure the enhanced protection, safety and dignity of women and girls fleeing Ukraine. The meaningful participation of women and young people's groups, including those from marginalised groups, should be facilitated in all decision-making processes, including in planning, coordination, implementation and monitoring of the humanitarian response cycle. This includes ensuring accessibility to international conversations and coordination mechanisms.
2. Engage with media to amplify local voices and experiences of women and young people we support, and assist them to become the main spokespersons communicating from Ukraine. Additionally, create and share content which has been developed using a strong feminist and anti-racist approach, amplifying their voices.
3. Ensure innovative and flexible funding mechanisms that are more accessible to local WLOs, including WROs, feminist organisations, and those who have been responding to the crisis in Ukraine. This includes:
 - Provide unrestricted multi-year funding, which can be tailored and adapted, and can include things such as core and overhead costs.
 - Reduce bureaucratic and administrative burdens of funding bids. Decrease the amount of paperwork required, including simplifying systems of reporting, , switch from quantitative indicators towards qualitative ones, and make funding mechanisms available in all relevant languages to allow WROs and WLOs greater access.
 - Develop funding programmes in consultation with local CSOs, to reduce competition for funding within national and local organisations.
 - Tracking and reporting direct and indirect funding to local WLOs in emergencies with systematic monitoring.

Endnotes

1. Through different tools, such as workshops, semi-structured interviews, surveys, feedback meetings, written contributions and informal conversations. ActionAid has also hold conversations with external stakeholders who prefer to remain anonymous. We also deeply thank them for their contributions.
2. See: OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Ukraine, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/18db203c-0d11-440b-958b-40ef16607cdc/Ukraine%20Humanitarian%20Needs%20Overview%202023.pdf> and; Osborn A. and Nikolskaya P 'Russia's Putin authorises 'special military operation' against Ukraine, Reuters Online. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-authorises-military-operations-donbass-domestic-media-2022-02-24/>
3. OHCHR (2023) Ukraine: Civilian casualty updated 13 February 2023 : <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/02/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-13-february-2023>
4. Al Jazeera (2022), Ukraine's wartime winter: Which energy facilities are at risk? <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/13/can-ukraines-energy-infrastructure-withstand-the-winter>
5. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/175836-war-has-caused-fastest-and-largest-displacement-people-europe-world-war-ii>
6. As per 15/02/2023 there are 8,075,440 refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe, according to <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>
7. 90% of the refugees are women and children. Regional Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation, Recalibration, March-December 2022: https://www.unhcr.org/by/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/10/2022-RRP-Ukraine-Situation-Addendum_Annexes.pdf
Besides, near 60% of the IDPs are women, according to the Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023. More information at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>
8. Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation (2022), "Making the Invisible Visible: And evidence-based analysis of gender in the regional response to the war in Ukraine": <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine>
9. On WROs and WLOs, please see ActionAid (2019) "Leading the way: Women-led localisation in Central Sulawesi: Towards gender transformative action", <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/leading-the-way-women-led-localisation-in-central-sulawesi-report> And on young people leadership, ActionAid (2019) "Shifting power to young people in humanitarian action: How young people can lead and drive solutions in humanitarian action", <https://actionaid.org/publications/2019/shifting-power-young-people-humanitarian-action>
10. Limitations on accessing the adequate equipment and training to be able to operate properly in the active-conflict zones have been highlighted in different conversations with partners. It was also one of the points addressed in the national workshop "Localizing Humanitarian Aid in Ukraine" (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdRbNfK076dFO01lffbXl2idS9QL2inLE8nJei82RjbxVbc-Q/viewform>), organized by several Ukrainian and International NGOs on the 17th of February. To provide some support in this area, since mid-2022 ActionAid has provided partners with first aid training and security resources.
11. ActionAid (2019) Leading the way: Women-led localisation in Central Sulawesi: Towards gender transformative action. <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/leading-the-way-women-led-localisation-in-central-sulawesi-report>
12. We are referring to the 2022 Ukraine Recovery Conference (Lugano, <https://www.urc-international.com>), and the International Expert Conference on the Recovery of Ukraine (Berlin, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/ip_22_6336).
13. Among the 38 partner organizations that ActionAid has been working with throughout the past months in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, as part of the humanitarian crisis, some of them work with at risk and excluded groups, such as neurodivergent people and with other disabilities; young women and adolescents living with HIV, older women, and women who have been forced into sex-trafficking networks. This report includes some references to the work led by partners with these groups. However, we acknowledge the limitations in amplifying all their voices, the main experiences represented in the policy brief correspond to the self-organized groups mentioned above.
14. According to the European Union, "third-country national" would be any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>), and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement (See definition at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/third-country-national_en)
15. UN launches record \$51.5 billion humanitarian appeal for 2023: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/un-launches-record-515-billion-humanitarian-appeal-2023-enaresfruzh>
16. OCHA (2022), Humanitarian Needs Overview Ukraine 2023 : <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>
17. As per 13/02/2023 there are 4.848.209 Refugees from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe, according to <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>
18. See ActionAid's HRBA resource book, which reflects on ActionAid's experiences, approaches and practices of working for change within a human rights-based approach, resource available at: <https://myanmar.actionaid.org/sites/myanmar/files/publications/HRBA%20Resource%20Book.pdf>
19. At ActionAid, we define feminist leadership as positive and inclusive use of power to build an organisation that is capable of changing the world. See more: ActionAid's Ten Principles of Feminist Leadership, at <https://actionaid.org/feminist-leadership>.
20. For ActionAid, the terms 'Women-Led Organisations' (WLOs) and 'Women's Rights Organisations' (WROs) refer to organisations that are led or predominantly composed of women in leadership positions, and who work towards advancing gender equality and supporting the needs of women and girls. The term young people's organisations refer to formally and informally coordinated groups of young people that operate under the leadership of young people. Young people's organisations are a multi-sector group that focuses on providing support, resources and activities for young people and their networks.
21. See: ActionAid (2019) 'Leading the Way: Women-Led Localisation in Central Sulawesi: Towards Gender Transformative Action', ActionAid; FletcherWood and Mutandwa, (2019) 'Funding a localised, women led approach to protection from Gender Based Violence: What is the data telling us?' ActionAid; Barclay et al (2017) 'On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action', ActionAid; Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK; Lambert, Rhodes and Zaaroura (2018) 'A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action'. Oxfam Canada.
22. Most women and children have been separated from their husbands and fathers who remained because of the ban preventing Ukrainian men of conscription age (18-60 years old) to leave Ukraine, alongside other conflict-related drivers of separation. This has resulted in a high number of single-parented households led by women as well as children being separated from parents and other relatives, leaving them at heightened risk.
23. See: Care International and UN women (2022) Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine, Retrieved online: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/rapid-gender-analysis-of-ukraine>
24. Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation (2022), "Making the Invisible Visible: And evidence-based analysis of gender in the regional response to the war in Ukraine": <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine>



Children and women's dignity kit packages at Insight humanitarian Hub, Ukraine (Anastasia Vlasova/ActionAid).

25. OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview: Ukraine, Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2023 and Care International and UN women (2022) Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine, Retrieved online: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/rapid-gender-analysis-of-ukraine>
26. E.g., references of women who may be displaced and forced to be brought back in contact with former partners who may be violent, or unable to leave an abuser. See more at: VOICE Amplified (2022) Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine, at <https://voiceamplified.org/waiting-for-the-sky-to-close>
27. The ongoing partnership between ActionAid and NGO Girls started on 1st of August of 2022. For more details on the organisation, please consult <https://www.divchata.org>
28. The Blue Dots Hubs have been established by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Children's Fund, to provide practical support and information to children and families in their onward journeys fleeing from Ukraine. Blue Dots have been set up to provide specialist support for those in need of protection, such as children traveling on their own, women with young children, persons with disabilities or survivors of sexual violence. See more here: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-are-blue-dots-hubs>
29. Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation (2022), "Making the Invisible Visible: And evidence-based analysis of gender in the regional response to the war in Ukraine": <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine>
30. Ibid.
31. VOICE Amplified (2022) Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine, <https://voiceamplified.org/waiting-for-the-sky-to-close>
32. See the "Gender-Based Violence in Ukraine, Secondary Data Review, 27 April 2022" from the Ukraine's GBV Sub-Cluster <https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2022-05/Ukraine%20GBV%20SDR%202025%205%2022%20Final%20format%20amended.pdf>
33. According to WHO, as per 20 of February 713 of the 802 attacks had impacted health facilities, and the rest had impacted health transport, personnel, supplies, warehouses or patients. For updated data, please see: <https://extranet.who.int/ssa/LeftMenu/Index.aspx>
34. The ongoing partnership between eLiberare and ActionAid started on April 1st, 2022. For more information on their work, please consult their website <https://www.eliberare.com>
35. Feminoteka and ActionAid had an active partnership between 1st of April and 30 September 2022. For more details on the work of the organisation, please see <https://feminoteka.pl>
36. See more information at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTIP_2022_web.pdf and UN Press (2022): "Sexual Violence 'Most Hidden Crime' Being Committed against Ukrainians, Civil Society Representative Tells Security Council", <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14926.doc.htm>
37. Kuchnia Konflikту and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership on 1st of April 2022. For more information on the organisation, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/kuchniakonfliktu>
38. VOICE Amplified (2022) Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine, at <https://voiceamplified.org/waiting-for-the-sky-to-close>
39. OCHA (2023) Ukraine Flash Appeal Funding Snapshot – 10 January 2023. Retrieved online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-2022-flash-appeal-funding-snapshot-10-january-2023>
40. See: ActionAid (2019) 'Leading the Way: Women-Led Localisation in Central Sulawesi: Towards Gender Transformative Action', ActionAid; FletcherWood and Mutandwa, (2019) 'Funding a localised, women led approach to protection from Gender Based Violence: What is the data telling us?' ActionAid; Barclay et al (2017) 'On the frontline: catalysing women's leadership in humanitarian action', ActionAid; Lindley-Jones, H. (2018) 'Women responders: Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming', Care International UK; Lambert, Rhodes and Zaaroura (2018) 'A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action'. Oxfam Canada

41. Insight and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership on the 1st of May 2022. For more detail on the work they are doing, please visit <https://www.insight-ukraine.org>
42. Legalife and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership on the 1st of August 2022. For more information on the organization, please consult <https://legalifeukraine.com>
43. Polish Women's Strike, also called *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* and ActionAid developed an active partnership between 1st of April and 31st October 2022. For more information on the organisation, please consult <http://strajkkobiet.eu>
44. *Asociația pentru Dezvoltare prin Educație, Informare și Susținere - DEIS*, and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership on 1st of May 2022. For more detailed information on their work, please visit: <https://www.deis.ro/asociatia-deis/asociatia-deis>
45. ActionAid and *Platforma Femeilor Rome*-ROMNI started their ongoing partnership on 1st of May 2022. For more details on their work, please consult: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064633812019>
46. The ongoing partnership between ActionAid and Campaign Against Homophobia (also called *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii*), started the 1st of June 2022. More detail on their work is available at <https://kph.org.pl>
47. ActionAid and *Centrul de Mediere și Securitate Comunitară*-CMSC, currently holding the presidency of Romanian Women's Lobby -RoWL, started their ongoing partnership on the 1st of May 2022. More detail on their work is available at <https://www.cmssc.ro> and <https://www.facebook.com/ROWLobby>
48. Egala and ActionAid partnership was active between July 1st and December 31st. More information on the work developed by the organisation in Białystok, near the border with Belarus, can be found at <https://egala.org.pl/in-english>
49. ActionAid and "Women Association "Sphere", based in Kharkiv and providing service to different cities in this oblast, started their ongoing partnership on 1st of July 2022
50. Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health (HealthRight) and ActionAid established their ongoing partnership on the 1st of August 2022. For more information on the organization, please consult: <https://www.healthright.org.ua>
51. Fundația Națională pentru Tineret and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership on 1st of April 2022. For more information, please consult <https://arhiva.rotineret.ro>
52. ADRA and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership the 1st of April 2022. For more details on their work, please consult: <https://adra.ro>
53. ActionAid and Charity Foundation «East-SOS» (Vostok SOS) started their ongoing partnership on September 1st. For more information on the work of the organization, please consult <https://vostok-sos.org>
54. Reuters (2022) World Bank says Ukraine has tenfold increase in poverty due to war: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/world-bank-says-ukraine-has-tenfold-increase-poverty-due-war-2022-10-15>
55. ActionAid (2022) Doubly Devastating: Local communities disproportionately affected by food, fuel, and fertiliser price rises: <https://actionaid.org/publications/2022/doubly-devastating-local-communities-disproportionately-affected-food-fuel-and>
56. Ibid.
57. FAO (2022), Information Note - The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine : <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>
58. UN Women (2022) Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/policy-paper-global-gendered-impacts-of-the-ukraine-crisis>
59. UN Women (2022) Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/policy-paper-global-gendered-impacts-of-the-ukraine-crisis>
60. FAO (2022). Gender-related impacts of the Ukraine Conflict. Entry points for gender-responsive and inclusive interventions for Ukraine crisis: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9419en/cb9419en.pdf>
61. VOICE Amplified (2022) Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine, Resource Available: <https://voiceamplified.org/waiting-for-the-sky-to-close>.
62. In Moldova and Romania 80 percent and 90 percent of the displaced persons are hosted respectively in private homes. Ref. VOICE Amplified (2022), Ibid.
63. ILGA-Europe (2022) Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex people covering events that occurred in Europe and Central Asia Between January-December, 2021, <https://ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2022/>
64. OHCHR (2022) Universal Periodic Review -Poland. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/pl-index>
65. According to the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025), anti-Gypsyism is one of the most powerful mechanisms of Roma exclusion, and recommends initiatives to address anti-Gypsyism and antidiscrimination, including the social and economic inclusion of Roma in areas such as education, health, employment and housing. More information at <https://rm.coe.int/coe-strategic-action-plan-for-roma-and-traveller-inclusion-en/16809fe0d0>
66. See "Ukraine war disrupts education for more than five million children: UNICEF". Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1132757>
67. Since 24 February 2022, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) has documented damage or destruction of 501 educational facilities, affecting the access of 6 million children to education. 2,738 education facilities have been impacted, of which 337 were destroyed.
68. UNICEF (2023) 11 months of war in Ukraine have disrupted education for more than five million children, Press Release. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/11-months-war-ukraine-have-disrupted-education-more-five-million-children>
69. CARE, SER, FONPC, FONSS and PLAN (2022) Rapid Gender Analysis Brief Ukrainian Refugees in Romania: <https://careevaluations.org/evaluation/rapid-gender-analysis-brief-ukrainian-refugees-in-romania>
70. ActionAid and Ukrainian Women's Fund started their ongoing partnership on July 1st. For more information on the organisation, please consult <https://uwf.org.ua>
71. In Moldova, forcibly displaced persons have the right to work without obtaining a residence and work permit for the period of the state of emergency. In Poland, all Ukrainian forcibly displaced person who crossed the border after February 24 have a right to work without special permissions. In Romania, Ukrainian forcibly displaced persons are not required to have temporary protection status or a work permit to gain legal work for the first 90 days of their stay. Ref. VOICE (2022), *ibid*.
72. CARE (2022) Rapid Gender Analysis Brief Ukrainian Refugees in Moldova, Retrieved online: <https://careevaluations.org/evaluation/rapid-gender-analysis-brief-ukrainian-refugees-in-moldova/>
73. ActionAid and Asociația Română pentru Promovarea Calității și a Practicilor de Succes (ARPCPS) - Migrant Integration Center Brasov had a partnership between May and August 2022. To know more about the organization, please consult <https://migrantbrasov.ro>
74. Mai bine and ActionAid developed an active partnership between May and August 2022. More information on their work can be consulted at <https://www.maibine.eu>
75. ActionAid and Fundacja Inicjatywa Dom Otwarty were partners between 1st of May and 31st of October 2022. More information on their work can be consulted at <https://www.facebook.com/InicjatywaDomOtwarty>
76. Fundacja Polza ("Polza Foundation") and ActionAid have been partners between July the 1st and December 31st. More information on the work of the organization, at <https://www.facebook.com/FundacjaPolzaBialystok>

77. ActionAid and Fundacja dla Somalii (currently changing their name into Fundacja dla Migrantów “Dobry Start” (Foundation for Migrants Good Start) started their ongoing partnership on April 1st, 2022. For more information, please consult <https://fds.org.pl>
78. ActionAid and Polska Akcja Humanitarna (in English Polish Humanitarian Action) are working together in Poland and Ukraine. It was the first partnership established by ActionAid in the region (March 1st, 2022), based in previous collaborations. For more information on the work of the organisation, please consult <https://www.pah.org.pl>
79. ActionAid and Roma Awareness Foundation established their partnership on April 20th, 2022.
80. Youth Organization “STAN” and ActionAid started their ongoing partnership on 1st November 2022. For more information on the organization, please consult <https://stan.org.ua>
81. CARE and UN Women (2022) Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/rapid-gender-analysis-of-ukraine>
82. Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation (2022), “Making the Invisible Visible: An evidence-based analysis of gender in the regional response to the war in Ukraine”: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/10/making-the-invisible-visible-an-evidence-based-analysis-of-gender-in-the-regional-response-to-the-war-in-ukraine>
83. ActionAid (2016), Through a Different Lens: ActionAid’s Resilience Framework: <https://actionaid.org/publications/2016/through-different-lens-actionaids-resilience-framework>
84. A series of international human rights treaties and other instruments adopted since 1945 have conferred legal form on inherent human rights and developed the body of international human rights law, which lays down obligations for States to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law>
- Some of the most relevant in terms of antidiscrimination, include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cerd.pdf>), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>), or the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/CRPD_ENG.pdf)
85. See “discrimination” meaning according to OHCHR, at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/taxonomy/term/896>
86. ActionAid (2022) “On World Refugee Day: Why the world needs to stop being racist to refugees”, <https://actionaid.org/opinions/2022/world-refugee-day-why-world-needs-stop-being-racist-refugees>
87. One week after the invasion, on the 4th of March, the EU activated the Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001, on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0055&from=EN>
88. Detailed infographics on the coverage of the EU temporary protection directive, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/temporary-protection-displaced-persons>
89. According to this article published in early March, around 80,000 students from African and Asian countries could have been studying in Ukraine by the time Russia invaded Ukraine. The article refers to the different ethnicities living in Ukraine at the time, and provides several testimonies on the different treatment of people of colour at the borders: <https://time.com/6153276/ukraine-refugees-racism>
90. See for instance the Statement of the African Union on the reported ill treatment of Africans trying to leave Ukraine released on the 28th of February 2022, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220228/statement-ill-treatment-africans-trying-leave-ukraine>
91. EU Observer - Opinion (2022) “EU welcome for Ukraine refugees – a new gold standard?” <https://euobserver.com/opinion/154760>
92. The Directive did extend its protection to some specific categories of third country nationals and stateless people, such as persons legally residing in Ukraine before the 24/02/2022, on a long-term basis, refugees, asylum seekers and some family members. But clearly stated that remained to Member States directionality to extend temporary protection to additional categories of displaced persons. As a positive example, Spain, by this by this Council of Ministers’ agreement (https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-3716, in Spanish) extended temporary protection to those who were residing in Ukraine with temporary residence permits, rather than only permanent ones. For more details, see this analysis on the Council Directive at <https://www.asileproject.eu/preferential-differential-or-discriminatory-eu-protection-arrangements-for-persons-displaced-from-ukraine/> There are some groups which have not been able to flee from Ukraine even if they wished to: men between 18 and 60, trans women without documents that legally match their identities, and also people with reduced mobility such as the elderly population and people with disabilities.
93. The temporary protection was planned to last until 4 March 2023, but an extension till 4 March 2024 is already being discussed (and could be potentially extended for another year, see EU Solidarity with Ukraine, https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-your-rights-eu_en). In October 2022 the Netherlands government stated that in 2023 the temporary protection would end for some categories of third country nationals. Part of the plans to support this group, includes a so-called ‘voluntary’ return. More info at <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2022/10/14/european-commission-extends-temporary-protection-directive>
94. ActionAid is currently conducting a needs assessment with partner organisations that will be published in the first trimester of 2023.
95. For instance, in 2021, LGBTQI+ people and members of the Roma community were among the most stereotyped groups in Ukrainian society, according to the 2021 Ukraine Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index, https://api.scoreforpeace.org/storage/pdfs/REP_DGEUkr21_SocCoh_IL_v1.7.pdf
96. According to an ActionAid survey conducted with partners in January 2023
97. Legalife mission is to “unite and build a powerful community of sex workers in Ukraine in order to jointly protect the rights of women, men and transgender people engaged in sex work”, in a vision for a society where “sex workers can live and work without experiencing violence, stigma, and discrimination” and “have opportunities to influence public policy and address issues that directly affect their lives and health, and are actively engaged in this process”. See <https://legalifeukraine.com/en/about>
98. ActionAid and LOGS- Grup de Initiative Sociale, based in Timisoara, Romania, started their ongoing partnership on 1st of May 2022. More information on the organisation is available at <https://grupullogs.ro>
99. See <http://www.radiopatrin.md/en>
100. Women’s March Ukraine is a daughter organization of the NGO Insight. For more information on their work, please consult <https://marsh-zhinok.com.ua>
101. ODI (2022) “Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2022”, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/grand-bargain-annual-independent-report-2022>
102. OCHA (2023) Ukraine: 2022 Flash Appeal Funding Snapshot - 10 January 2023 - Ukraine | ReliefWeb, Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-2022-flash-appeal-funding-snapshot-10-january-2023>
103. ActionAid (2021): “Bargaining for Better. Bringing a Feminist Lens to the Grand Bargain 2.0”. Retrieved from: <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Bargaining%20for%20Better.pdf>
104. ActionAid (2022) “Leading the Way: The Nexus through a Feminist Lens”. Retrieved from: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ActionAid%20Leading%20the%20Way%20The%20Nexus%20through%20a%20Feminist%20Lens.pdf>

This report was co-authored by a core Ukraine research team from across the ActionAid Federation: Jara Henar, Niki Ignatiou and Francisco Yermo.

The following local and national ActionAid partners who are responding to this crisis have endorsed and supported the production of this report:



ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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International Registration number 27264198